



"Serving Michigan's Cattlemen Since 1960"

March 7, 2006

Agriculture Committee
Michigan House of Representatives
c/o Representative Neal Nitz, Chairman
P.O. Box 30014
Lansing, MI 48909-7514

Dear Members of the House Agriculture Committee:

The Michigan Cattlemen's Association is seeking your support of House Bills 5711-5716. This legislative package will enhance the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP) by providing farmers with a clear set of environmental rules and regulations to follow.

As one of the partners in the development of the MAEAP program, we were pleased that President Bush recognized MAEAP as one of the top 150 cooperative conservation programs in the United States. MAEAP's environmental program reaches to farms of all sizes and commodities through environmental risk assessments in the areas of livestock, farmstead and cropping, including orchards and nurseries.

But the way the MAEAP program is currently structured, the program is not recognized in state statute. There needs to be a legislative or legal value for a farm to achieve MAEAP verification. In order for farmers to be good stewards of their land, they need to know the rules so they can plan accordingly. There needs to be consistency and clear direction in the enforcement of environmental regulations on farms. This legislation would provide farmers the regulatory stability they need to operate productive businesses.

Agriculture is a tremendous part of Michigan's economy and farmers represent Michigan's original conservationists. In fact, a recent economic study commissioned by Governor Granholm reveals that Michigan's agri-food system accounts for \$60.1 billion in direct and indirect economic activity annually, 1.05 million jobs both directly and indirectly and a large amount of investment activity estimated at \$8.6 billion over the last five years.

Voluntary incentive-driven programs work for agriculture. Michigan's Right to Farm and participation in the USDA Farm Bill conservation programs are excellent examples of how voluntary programs work in Michigan. MAEAP is built on the Right to Farm Act and has been tailored to work hand in hand with Farm Bill programs like the Conservation Security Program.

The Michigan Cattlemen's Association urges you to vote for the passage of House Bills 5711-5716. This legislation not only impacts all Michigan farms regardless of size or commodity, but it has an effect on agriculture's \$60 billion contribution to the Michigan economy and the 1 million jobs the agri-food sector provides.

Sincerely,

Andy Salinas
President